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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MANAGEMENT ADVISORY GROUP

25 MAR 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Executive Director

SUBJECT: Recommendation on Lengthening the Employee Probationary Period

1. CIA officers enjoy, in fact if not in theory, virtually unparalleled job security. They do not face the service officers' maximum time-in-grade hurdles nor the periodic competitive weeding out FSO's undergo.

2. There is one time only in his career when the inept CIA employee faces any real prospect of discharge: during his first or probationary year. Having survived 365 days, he is safe against all but the grossest offenses against security, decorum, or the law.

3. The Agency, traditionally very chary of exercising the DCI's statutory authority to make summary dismissals, has only proved willing to discharge the inept or miscast employee during his probationary year. In the last five years an average of 40 professional-level employees ([REDACTED] of all new employees) were so separated each year. In contrast, virtually none were discharged during this five years after their probationary periods had been completed. 25X9

4. The Agency seems content, and perhaps is morally obligated, to carry to retirement eligibility the formerly able officer who peaked after 15 years and is coasting. It correctly feels no similar obligations to the new officer who usually has minimal family obligations and a minuscule investment of tenure in his intelligence career.

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5. Despite the best of screening aids, hiring mistakes are inevitable. Many new employees themselves recognize mistaken career choices, and the greatest percentage of resignations in Agency professional ranks occur during the first five years of employment.

6. The Agency gives itself only a year to recognize and correct such hiring mistakes. MAG believes this time is clearly too short. CT's are still in training status when the year has expired (and are often receiving protective performance evaluations and "extra help" from their counselors.) PTP officers are still busily indexing documents in RID and dreaming of a future CS career. CS careerists can be evaluated fully only on their field performance, and few are lucky enough to escape desk servitude within a year.

7. MAG finds cumbersome, unnecessary, and possibly disadvantageous the suggestion of hiring new employees under contract. The paperwork is unnecessary, and the Agency's primary recruiting theme - "a career in intelligence" - becomes a bit hollow when followed by a contract offer with the standard 30-day notice clause. Adoption of such a practice would undoubtedly put us at a hiring disadvantage.

8. The contract suggestion rests in fact on recognition that Agency management has grown accustomed to letting contracts lapse but has shied away from firing staffers. It is thus in essence a dodge to circumvent traditional attitudes and practices.

9. Why not, instead, change practice? There is no statutory bar to CIA's setting any probationary period it wishes for new employees. MAG advocates adopting a five-year probationary period, with rigorous, competitive weeding-out hazards to be faced at the end of the third and fifth years.

10. This proposal parallels roughly the Macomber task force recommendations for fairly ruthless competitive selection out of less promising junior FSO's. It assumes that marginality can be detected fairly early in a career. (There is good

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evidence for this, in, among other places, the results of the CS evaluation panels.) It assumes that surgery is better and more humane early in a career than later. It holds the promise of fewer career misfits and of fewer future cuts in the established officer corps. It permits us to risk a greater infusion of new blood.

11. MAG advocates competitive ranking of new employees in each directorate and the automatic discharge at the end of three years of the lowest 10% and at the end of five years of another 5%. (There is nothing sacrosanct about the percentage cuts recommended but we think their logic can be supported. The CS Evaluation Boards are having little difficulty identifying a marginal 5% at each grade among more senior officers and we think the rationale of a probationary period argues for more rigorous pruning then than at mid-career.)

12. We suggest this procedure because the firing decision is always a painful one. No "sensible" supervisor wants to document the record, write the fateful recommendation, nor face down an irate employee. It is easier to try to palm off a marginal employee on another shop. The fixed percentage requirement avoids all this and ensures that the non-competitive officer is impartially identified and acted against. The two-stage procedure should permit some career experimentation and the rehabilitation of employees possibly miscast in one directorate but entirely competitive in another.

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